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THE

SANDMAN™

DISTANT·MIRRORS

THERMIDOR

by
NEIL GAIMAN
STAN WOCH
DICK GIORDANO

JUNE 28th, 1794.
WYCH CROSS, ENGLAND.

WHO? WHO'S THERE?

You are Lady Johanna Constantine, are you not?

SIR! I WILL CALL FOR THE SERVANTS--

Your servants sleep, Milady. But we are old friends, you and I.

We met in a tavern, Johanna, five years gone

At the time you a believed me a demon. Have you learned differently since?

YES. I HAVE. IF-- IF YOU ARE WHO I THINK YOU ARE.

I am.

THEN WHAT WOULD YOU WITH ME... SIR?

There is a task I need accomplished. I... I cannot involve myself directly in the matter. It is a family affair...

SO YOU NEED A MORTAL AGENT?

Yes.

IS IT DANGEROUS? THIS TASK OF YOURS?

Yes. extremely so.

WHAT ARE YOU OFFERING ME, THEN, TO RISK LIFE OR MIND FOR YOU?

GOLD? OR PROPERTY?

No, milady. Birth has blessed you with a surplus of both; and I have neither.

THEN WHAT?

I will give you what it is in my power to give you, Lady Johanna Constantine.

THEN...

THEN I AGREE.

CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

PARIS, FRANCE. JULY 24th, 1794.
OF THE REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR: 6th THERMIDOR, YEAR II.

STOP RIGHT THERE, CITIZENESS. YOU ARE OUT VERY *LATE*, ARE YOU NOT?

WHERE ARE YOU GOING, *HEIN*?

AND WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN THAT *SACK*, EH, CITIZENESS?

I HAVE A ROOM IN AN INN, HERE IN MONTMARAT, CITIZENS. AND I HAVE NOTHING IN THIS SACK THAT WOULD INTEREST YOU.

IT'S A HUNGRY BUSINESS, THIS. WE HAVE BEEN HOPING THAT SOME FOOD WOULD PASS BY THAT WE COULD LIBERATE-- A HAM, PERHAPS, OR A CABBAGE.

OPEN THE SACK.

THERE, MY GALLANTS. SATISFIED?

PFAHH! VILE THING!

THAT'S A STRANGE TROPHY FOR A YOUNG CITIZENESS TO POSSESS. TO WHOM DID IT BELONG?

THIS? THIS ARISTO SWINE VIOLATED ANNE-CLAIRE, MY LITTLE SISTER, THREE YEARS GONE. HE HAD HER, AND HIS MEN LOOKED ON AND LAUGHED...

THE POOR LITTLE THING TOOK LEAVE OF HER SENSES FOLLOWING HER ORDEAL. LAST WINTER SHE HANGED HERSELF.

WHEN I HEARD THAT THIS MONSTER HAD BEEN BROUGHT BEFORE THE COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY, I WALKED TO PARIS, AND I... PERSUADED MONSIEUR SANSON TO GIVE ME HIS HEAD.

I WILL TAKE IT BACK TO MY VILLAGE, WHERE MY POOR OLD MOTHER WAITS FOR ME.

AND I WILL SHOW IT TO HER, AND SHE WILL SPIT IN ITS ROTTEN ARISTO FACE -- LIKE THIS!

TTUU!

AND THEN I WILL PLACE IT ON LITTLE ANNE-CLAIRE'S GRAVE.

AND I WILL LEAVE IT TO ROT.

HAHHAHAHH HAHHAH!

GUILLAUME, LET HER BE. SHE'S A MADWOMAN, A GHOUL.

LET HER BE? HMPH--YOUR EYES ARE AS DULL AS YOUR WITS, MICHEL.

COME HERE, MY PRETTY. COME MORE CLOSE TO GUILLAUME.

I WISH TO INSPECT YOUR HEAD MORE CLOSELY.

THIS WILL BUY MANY HAM-HOCKS, MANY CABBAGES, AND MANY BOTTLES OF WINE.

THANK YOU A THOUSAND TIMES, MY PRETTY. THE NEXT TIME YOU HAVE TREASURE TO DONATE TO THE PEOPLE, PLEASE, COME DOWN THIS ROAD ALSO.

EH, GUILLAUME. WHY DO I EVER DOUBT YOU?

BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOTHING BETWEEN YOUR EARS BUT FEATHERS AND CHICKEN-DROPPINGS, MY FRIEND.

OHH, ÇA IRA, ÇA IRA, ÇA IRA, LES ARISTOCRATES À LA LANTERNE...

I AM SORRY.

IT CANNOT BE HELPED. THE EARRING WILL BRING HIM NOTHING BUT MISERY, AND EVENTUALLY IT WILL COME BACK TO ME. IT HAS BEEN STOLEN BEFORE NOW...

FRANKLY, MADAME, I AM MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT *THEY* WILL SAY TO THEIR SUPERIORS.

THE WORD WILL BE OUT SOON TO LOOK FOR A YOUNG WOMAN WITH A HEAD.

WITH *TWO* HEADS, SIR.

YES. WITH TWO HEADS.

WE CAN'T GET OUT OF PARIS UNTIL TOMORROW MORNING, WHEN THE CITY GATES ARE OPENED...

BUT THEY *HAVE*, MILADY.

AND WE MUST THINK FAST, ELSE WE ARE BOTH AS GOOD AS LOST.

AYE, MASTER ORPHEUS. WELL, THEY DO SAY THAT TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE.

DAMN-ME FOR A *FOOL*, SIR. I WISH THEY HAD *NOT* SEEN YOU.

IT'S NO GOOD, CAPTAIN. IT IS NOT HERE.

I SEE.

WHERE HAVE YOU HIDDEN IT? *HEIN?*

I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.

CITIZENESS BONCHANCE. WE *KNOW* THAT YOU HAD IN YOUR POSSESSION A... A *SOMETHING*. WHERE HAVE YOU *HIDDEN* IT?

THE *CROWD* WILL SING THE *CARMAGNOLE* AS YOUR FACE TUMBLES INTO THE BASKET.

TALK TO *US*, MY LITTLE CABBAGE, OR MADAME GUILLOTINE WILL STILL YOUR TONGUE FOR-EVER.

I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.

TALK! OR I'LL *EAT* YOUR *BRAINS* AND *SHIT* IN YOUR *SKULL*...

WHERE IS *SHE?*

WHERE *ARE* THEY?

AH. CAPTAIN. GOOD DAY.

CITIZEN ST. JUST. I... I... GOOD DAY...

WELL? HAVE YOU FOUND IT YET?

NOT YET. BUT LEAVE ME AND A MAN ALONE WITH HER FOR HALF AN HOUR AND SHE WILL SING LIKE A NIGHTINGALE, I PROMISE YOU.

YES. YOU WOULD ENJOY THAT, WOULDN'T YOU?

BUT NO, I AM AFRAID NOT, MY FRIEND. YOU AND YOUR MEN STAY HERE. SEARCH THE NEIGHBORHOOD. KEEP SEARCHING.

THE LADY, ON THE OTHER HAND, COMES WITH ME.

BUT -- M. ST. JUST, MY ORDERS ARE--

DO YOU WISH TO DEBATE THIS WITH THE COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY, CAPTAIN?

BECAUSE IF YOU DO, I DO NOT DOUBT THE REVOLUTION WILL CONTINUE WITHOUT YOU.

I DID NOT MEAN... YOUR PARDON, CITIZEN, I...

PLEASE -- TAKE HER. WE WILL CONTINUE TO SEARCH.

PLEASE. YOUR PARDON.

WHERE ARE WE GOING, THEN?

YOU ARE GOING TO THE LUXEMBOURG, LADY.

I THOUGHT YOU KEPT THE LUXEMBOURG FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS.

NOT FOR POOR COUNTRY GIRLS, UNJUSTLY ACCUSED OF STEALING SOMETHING--I KNOW NOT WHAT.

BUT M. ROBESPIERRE TELLS ME YOU ARE NO COUNTRY GIRL. AND M. ROBESPIERRE KNOWS MANY THINGS.

STILL, REST ASSURED, CITIZENESS, YOU WILL NOT STAY IN THE LUXEMBOURG LONG...

AFTER ALL, THE LAW OF PRAIRIAL GIVES BUT TWO VERDICTS FOR THOSE WHO TROUBLE THE STATE: THERE IS ACQUITTAL, OR THERE IS DEATH.

YES. THE SAME LAW THAT EXCUSES THE COMMITTEE FROM HEARING ANY DEFENSE EVIDENCE, M. ST. JUST.

LIBERTY IS A BITCH WHO MUST BE BEDDED ON A MATTRESS OF CORPSES.

IS THAT ORIGINAL, LOUIS-ANTOINE?

PERHAPS, JEANNE. ROBESPIERRE THINKS YOU ARE A SPY AND A THIEF.

MM. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK I WAS VERY FOOLISH TO MAKE LOVE TO YOU. FORTUNATELY ST. JUST IS ABOVE LOSING HIS HEAD OVER A WOMAN.

LOUIS. YOU COULD LET ME GO.

JUST TELL THE DRIVER TO TURN HIS HEAD, AND YOU WOULD NEVER HAVE TO SEE ME AGAIN.

JEANNE, I WILL HATE TO SEE YOUR PRETTY RED BLOOD SPATTER THE SHRIVELLED OLD TRICOTEUSES, AS THEY KNIT--KNIT--KNIT BENEATH THE GUILLOTINE...

BUT YOU SEE, MY PRETTY, I AM A REALIST. I BELIEVE NOTHING.

BUT M. ROBESPIERRE IS A VISIONARY: HE BELIEVES. HE TRULY BELIEVES.

AND IF I BETRAYED HIM... MM. THEN ST. JUST WOULD LOSE HIS HEAD. OVER A WOMAN.

"SEE HOW HOSPITABLE WE ARE, JEANNE? WE GIVE YOU A *PALACE* TO LIVE IN.

"HAHAHA!"

"*VERY* DROLL, CITIZEN ST. JUST."

STILL, UNLESS YOU TELL US WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW, YOU WILL NOT BE LIVING HERE LONG ENOUGH FOR THE LACK OF AMENITIES TO TROUBLE YOU.

HOY. ST. JUST! IS THERE *WORD* FROM *AMERICA*, YET? AM I TO BE *FREED*?

WORD? WHY *SHOULD* THERE BE WORD, MISTER PAINE? YOU ARE AN *EMBARRASSMENT* TO THEM.

THE ONLY WAY YOU WILL WALK FROM HERE IS WHEN YOU BEGIN THE JOURNEY THAT PERMITS NO RETURNING.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAS YOUR DAMNED COMMITTEE SENT TO THEIR DEATH IN THE LAST MONTH? *TEN THOUSAND*? *TWENTY*?

THIS REIGN OF TERROR IS AN EVIL, MONSTROUS THING. AND YOUR MASTER, ROBESPIERRE, IS THE MOST MONSTROUS OF THEM ALL.

"THESE ARE THE TIMES THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS. THE SUMMER SOLDIER AND THE SUNSHINE PATRIOT WILL, IN THIS CRISIS, SHRINK FROM THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY; BUT HE THAT STANDS IT **NOW**, DESERVES THE LOVE AND THANKS OF OUR MEN AND WOMEN.

"TYRANNY, LIKE HELL, IS NOT EASILY CONQUERED; YET WE HAVE THIS CONSOLATION WITH US, THAT THE HARDER THE CONFLICT, THE MORE GLORIOUS THE TRIUMPH.

"WHAT WE OBTAIN TOO CHEAP, WE ESTEEM TOO LIGHTLY: IT IS DEARNESS ONLY THAT GIVES EVERY THING ITS VALUE."

YOUR WORDS, PAINE. WE DO WHAT IS *NECESSARY* FOR *FREEDOM*, AND FOR *LIBERTY*. IF HEADS MUST ROLL, THEN SO *BE* IT.

WHAT I WROTE THEN IS STILL TRUE.

BUT YOU HAVE *PERVERTED* THE SPIRIT OF REVOLUTION -- TWISTED IT, MIRRORED IT INTO SOMETHING FOUL AND *PROFANE*.

THIS IS *FRANCE'S* REVOLUTION, PAINE. WE DO NOT *NEED* FOREIGNERS MEDDLING IN OUR AFFAIRS.

FRANCE FLIES THE FLAG OF LIBERTY, AND CITIZEN ROBESPIERRE IS OUR STANDARD-BEARER.

AYE, AND *YOU'RE* HIS *LAP DOG*.

WELL, *WHEN* HE IS TOPPLED, AS *ALL* TYRANTS *MUST* TOPPLE, *YOU* WILL FALL WITH HIM, ST. JUST. AND *THAT* IS A COMFORT TO ME.

HMM. *WOMAN* -- YOUR FACE SEEMS FAMILIAR TO ME. HAVE WE MET *BEFORE*? IN *AMERICA*, PERHAPS? OR IN *ENGLAND*?

I GET AROUND, M'SIEU. YOU KNOW HOW IT IS.

WE MUST GO. WE HAVE WASTED ENOUGH TIME, AND I HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO.

COME.

HE WAS *MEANT* TO HAVE BEEN GUILLOTINED LAST QUINTIDI. SOME FOOL ERASED THE MARK ON HIS DOOR THAT SHOULD HAVE TOLD THE GUARD TO TAKE HIM.

BUT PAINE WILL NOT LIVE TO SEE THE END OF THERMIDOR.

THE AMERICANS WILL BE AS PLEASED TO SEE HIM DEAD AS OURSELVES. PAINE IS USEFUL AS A RABBLE-ROUSER; BUT RABBLE-ROUSERS ARE NEEDED BEFORE REVOLUTIONS, NOT AFTER.

IN HERE, MY LITTLE ONE.

WILL YOU KILL *ALL* THE POETS, THEN, ST. JUST? WILL YOU KILL ALL THE *DREAMERS*?

WHEN THEY HAVE SERVED THEIR PURPOSE, *YES*.

FABRE D'EGLANTINE DEVISED OUR CALENDAR, AND HE DIED WITH DANTON LAST GERMINAL.

GOODBYE, JEANNE. WHOEVER YOU ARE.

I FEAR THAT I WILL *NOT* SEE YOU AGAIN; BUT THEN, THIS IS SOMETHING I HAVE BY NOW ACCUSTOMED MYSELF TO, AND I DO NOT ALLOW IT TO TROUBLE ME.

THERMIDOR

FROM THE JOURNALS OF LADY JOHANNA CONSTANTINE, VOL VI [MAY. 1793 - JAN 1794]. (BRITISH LIBRARY SEALED SHELVES: C. n110.ds8).

Thus it was I found myself immured in the Palace of Luxembourg. My Plight was not cheerful, and in my Younger Days I might perhaps have dropt a few Tears in the Tumult of my Senses; but I had been hardened by the Years, and was content to wait.

It is forever a matter of Amazement to me what trifling Consolations the Mind will seize upon, in Times of Misery. Myself, I sought Refuge at this Extremity in tabulating what I had so far accomplished.

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FEATURING CHARACTERS CREATED BY GAIMAN, KIETH & DRINGENBERG

I had crost the Channel without Incident; and I had, with Ease, made the acquaintance of Louis St. J— As I have remarked earlier in these Journals, those who consider themselves the Stronger Sex are, in many matters, more tractable than Children, when their Passions are to be Gratified.

In short, Men have a Fund of Gullibility, and (as my readers must by now have gathered) one I have never shrunk from Exploiting when it met my Purpose.

St. J— imprudently told me the whereabouts of my quarry, little realizing to whom he spoke; thus it was not long before I had betaken myself to the Crypt, and gained myself of what I sought

Where there is Life, there also is Hope, they say.

MADEMOISELLE. YOU WATCH OUR LITTLE PUPPET SHOW. IT IS *AMUSING*, IS IT NOT?

But my Death waited for me then, in the Place de la Revolution, at the edge of a Weighted Blade; and at that Time, and in that Place, I could foresee no way to avoid it.

NOW, LET ME SEE. YOUR NAME IS *NOT* JEANNE BONCHANCE. IT IS JOHANNA CONSTANTINE. YOU ARE THE ONLY CHILD OF LORD GEORGE AND LADY HARRIET CONSTANTINE; YOUR TWIN SISTER DIED SOON AFTER YOUR BIRTH.

YOU HAVE *NEVER* MARRIED.

POPULAR RUMOR HAS IT THAT YOUR TRUE FATHER WAS SIR FRANCES DASHWOOD, OF THE SO-CALLED MEDMENHAM MONKS. YOU ARE 32.

YOU SPEAK PERFECT FRENCH. BUT THEN, YOU ARE THE PROTEGÉ OF THE SO-CALLED CHEVALIER D'EON, EXILE, SPY AND ENEMY OF FRANCE. AND HE--OR *SHE*--HAS TAUGHT YOU WELL.

D'EON TAUGHT YOU *FRENCH*. TAUGHT YOU SOMETHING OF ESPIONAGE. AND, *IF* THESE REPORTS ARE TO BE BELIEVED, TAUGHT YOU THE ART OF SUCCESSFULLY CROSS-DRESSING.

YOU HAVE BEEN *POSITIVELY* IDENTIFIED AS THE YOUNG ENGLISH CAPTAIN INVOLVED IN THE THEFT OF *CERTAIN* PAPERS FROM THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL COURT IN 1786.

YOU WERE CERTAINLY INVOLVED IN THE SLAVE SCANDAL IN LOUISIANA THREE YEARS AGO. YOU WERE ALSO IN EGYPT, WHERE YOU NARROWLY ESCAPED BEING STRANGLED AS A WITCH.

YOU ARE NOW IN POSSESSION OF SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE. AN OBJECT OF *SUPERSTITION* AND *DECADENCE*. I WANT IT *BACK*, MADEMOISELLE CONSTANTINE.

GOOD DAY, CITIZEN ROBESPIERRE.

I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

PLEASE. ALL THE INFORMATION I HAVE BEEN GIVEN TELLS ME THAT YOU ARE AN INTELLIGENT PERSON. DO ME THE HONOR OF RESPECTING MY INTELLI-GENCE ALSO.

MY MEN OPENED THE CRYPT THIS MORNING. THEY FOUND THAT SOMEONE HAD BROKEN IN HOURS BEFORE THEM. THE BOX WAS *OPENED*, THE HEAD WAS *GONE*.

ST. JUST CAME TO ME, TOLD ME OF THE *COUNTRY GIRL* WHO HAD BEEN ASKING *QUESTIONS*...

TWO SOLDIERS TOLD US OF A WOMAN AND A HEAD.

WE FOUND *YOU*. WE DID *NOT* FIND THE HEAD. WHERE *IS* IT?

AND WHAT WOULD YOU *DO* WITH THE HEAD IF I TOLD YOU WHERE IT WAS?

I WOULD DESTROY IT UTTERLY. AND I WILL.

WE ARE REMAKING THE *WORLD*, WOMAN; WE ARE CREATING AN *AGE OF PURE REASON*. WE HAVE *TAKEN* THE NAMES OF DEAD GODS AND KINGS FROM THE DAYS OF THE WEEK AND THE MONTHS OF THE YEAR.

WE HAVE LOST THE SAINTS AND BURNT THE CHURCHES.

I MYSELF HAVE INAUGURATED A NEW RELIGION, BASED ON REASON, CELEBRATING AN *EGALITARIAN* SUPREME BEING, *DISTANT* AND *UNINVOLVED*.

DON'T YOU *UNDERSTAND*?

I WILL *NOT* HAVE AN OBJECT OF SUPERSTITION AT LARGE IN MY COUNTRY. WHETHER IT IS SOME *MAGICIAN'S TRICK*, OR SOME PLOT OF THE INFERNAL MISTER *PITT*, IT MATTERS NOT.

IF IT *THREATENS* FRANCE THEN IT IS *MY* BUSINESS.

SO I HAVE *SEEN*. YOU WILL SAVE FRANCE, IF YOU HAVE TO *KILL* EVERY *CHILD*, *WOMAN* AND *MAN* IN THE COUNTRY TO DO IT.

TELL ME, LITTLE CITIZEN. HAVE YOU EVER *SLEPT* WITH A *WOMAN*? OR WITH A *MAN*?

WE *WILL* FIND THE HEAD, WOMAN. AND *YOU* WILL HELP US FIND IT. YOU HAVE TONIGHT, TO THINK FURTHER ON THIS.

AND *THEN*...

WELL, MADEMOISELLE, BEING A FEATURED PLAYER IN A PUPPET SHOW IS *NOT* THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU.

THERE ARE *WORSE* THINGS. MANY OF WHICH *DO NOT* INVOLVE DYING FIRST.

GOOD DAY TO YOU, MADEMOISELLE.

I WILL SEE YOU LATER. IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND, THEN YOU MAY SEND A MESSAGE TO ME. AT THAT POINT ONLY YOU WILL BE GIVEN FOOD AND WATER.

IN THE MEANTIME, MY MEN WILL KEEP SEARCHING. AFTER ALL, HOW LONG CAN A HEAD REMAIN HIDDEN?

You are having problems, I see, Johanna.

I... YES. I AM. TO PUT IT MILDLY. CAN YOU... WILL YOU HELP ME?

Not directly, no.

I wish that I could. But I may not be seen to intervene in this matter.

WELL, SIR, MIGHT I SUGGEST YOU GIVE THE MATTER SOME THOUGHT? YOUR SON'S HEAD IS VALUABLE TO YOU, AND I AM ATTACHED TO MINE. INDEED, HITHERTO WE HAVE BEEN INSEPARABLE.

NOW IT APPEARS BOTH HEADS MAY BE LOST.

SIRE?

Yes, Jessamy.

IF I MIGHT MAKE A SUGGESTION, SIRE. YOUR SON KNEW MANY SONGS. IF HE WERE TO SING...

Hmm. You might have something there, Jessamy. He still has power. But for that to be effective he would need a chorus.

Hmm.

Drink this, Johanna. It will keep the waking world from stealing this meeting from you.

Remember my words, lady.

Very well, Johanna. Now: Listen...

IT CAME TO ME IN A DREAM! IT WAS SO OBVIOUS. SO BLINDINGLY OBVIOUS...

WHERE DO YOU HIDE A BOOK? IN A LIBRARY.

WHERE DO YOU HIDE A FLOWER? IN A GARDEN.

WHERE DO YOU HIDE A SEVERED HEAD?

WHERE... DO YOU HIDE... A SEVERED HEAD?

YOU TELL ME, CITIZEN ROBESPIERRE. YOU TELL ME.

YOU HIDE A SEVERED HEAD... AMONGST OTHER SEVERED HEADS, HIDE IT WITH THE CORPSES THAT HAVE NOT YET MADE THEIR JOURNEY TO THE LIME-PITS.

NOW, MADEMOISELLE. I HAVE ANSWERED YOUR QUESTION. PLEASE, ENTER. I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK OF YOU.

WILL YOU DO ME THE *COURTESY* OF INTRODUCING ME TO YOUR FRIEND?

FEUH! WHAT A *STINK!* MEAT DOES NOT KEEP WELL IN THIS JULY *HEAT.*

...*THERMIDOR.* I MEANT *THERMIDOR.*

MONSIEUR ROBESPIERRE...

EVEN NOW IT IS NOT TOO LATE.

YOU CAN *LET* ME GO. I WILL TAKE WHAT I CAME FOR AND LEAVE FRANCE, AND *NEVER* BOTHER YOU AGAIN.

REMEMBER *THIS:* THAT I OFFERED YOU ONE FINAL CHANCE TO LET THE MATTER LIE.

MADEMOISELLE, YOUR ATTEMPTS TO *THREATEN* ME ARE LAUGHABLE, AND BATHETIC. *GIVE* ME THE *HEAD.*

VERY WELL, CITIZEN. *THIS* IS THE HEAD OF ORPHEUS. RIPPED FROM HIS LIVING BODY BY THE BACCHANTE. THEY USED THEIR *BARE HANDS.*

THE *WOMEN* OF THE *FRENZY...*

THEY THREW HIS HEAD INTO THE HEBRUS, AND IT IS *SAID* THAT IT *STILL* CALLED THE NAME OF HIS LOST LOVE AS IT FLOATED DOWN TO THE *SEA*.

THIS IS THE HEAD OF *ORPHEUS*, WHO *BESTED* DEATH, AND WHO *NOW* CANNOT DIE.

DO YOU TAKE US FOR *PEASANTS*, JOHANNA?

THE MYTHS ARE *DEAD*. THE GODS ARE *DEAD*. THE GHOSTS AND GHOULS AND PHANTOMS ARE *DEAD*.

THERE IS *ONLY* THE *STATE*, AND THE *PEOPLE*.

NO, MONSIEUR ROBESPIERRE. THERE IS *MUCH* MORE THAN THAT.

ENOUGH OF THIS NONSENSE.

HENRI-- BRING ME THAT HEAD.

NOW. MESSIRE ORPHEUS.

SING TO THEM.

My Ears were covered, but I could not entirely obliterate the Sounds the Head made, as it began its Song. Although I possess a Modicum of Greek, the most part of the Words it used were unfamiliar to me. Still, by what Means or Mechanism I cannot say, I found myself deriving some Measure of Sense from its chanting. The Head sang first of Blood, of the Baying, Senseless Cries of the Mob; of the Anger of Women and Men; of the Worm that devours its own Flesh.

Then it sang of Freedom, of Liberty, of Love. And as it sang, I gazed in Dumbfoundment, for other Voices were also Raised in jagged Unison. Discordant Voices, Harsh Voices, the Voices of the Dead; and my friend (for so I now bethought him) no longer sang Alone.

The Ghastly Chorus sang of those who lead; of those who, by Virtue or Circumstance, are Raised above the Crowd; who Manipulate the Commonality will-they or nil-they, as a Puppet-master tugs on the Strings of a Marionette, or a Romany Traveller pulls the Leash of his Dancing Bear. It sang of a dream -- and of the Ending of the Dream.

I am not able to Conceive what it must have been like to hear that Song unprotected. M. St. J— and M. R—, and their Manservant, stood and listened like Statues, like Men Entranced.

After what seemed an Age, the Song ceased; and still they stood there.

And taking what I had come for, I left that Place.

JOHANNA CONSTANTINE LEFT PARIS SHORTLY AFTER DAWN ON THAT DAY, 8th THERMIDOR, YEAR II.

MY APOLOGIES, SIR.

ON THE 9th THERMIDOR, LOUIS-ANTOINE ST. JUST, THE GREAT ORATOR, FALTERED DURING HIS SPEECH BEFORE THE NATIONAL CONVENTION, AND FELL SILENT.

MAXMILIEN ROBESPIERRE, THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN FRANCE, THEN ATTEMPTED TO SPEAK. UNTIL THAT POINT HE HAD BEEN LISTENED TO WITH AWE, OR FEAR, OR SILENCE.

NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE FOUND HIMSELF LAUGHED AT, AND, ALSO FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE WAS LOST FOR WORDS.

THAT NIGHT HE AND HIS FACTION WERE DEPOSED AND ARRESTED, AND DURING THE ARREST ROBESPIERRE WAS SHOT IN THE JAW. OR PERHAPS HE FUMBLED A SUICIDE ATTEMPT. THE TRUTH HERE IS A MATTER OF CONJECTURE.

AND IT IS ALSO A MATTER OF RECORD THAT, IN THE END, MONSIEUR SANSON, THE EXECUTIONER, RIPPED OFF THE PAPER BANDAGE THAT HELD HIS JAW TOGETHER.

AND THAT ROBESPIERRE'S FINAL WORDLESS SCREAM OF PAIN WAS CUT OFF, WITH HIS HEAD, BY THE FALL OF THE WEIGHTED BLADE.

IT IS, HOWEVER, A MATTER OF RECORD THAT THE NEXT DAY, HIS SHATTERED JAW BOUND BY A PAPER BANDAGE, HE WATCHED ST. JUST STEP UP, SILENTLY, TO THE GUILLOTINE.

THE TERROR DIED WITH HIM.

SEPTEMBER 9th, 1794. NAXOS.

...THE *PRIESTS* WILL TAKE CARE OF ME. I STAYED ON THIS ISLAND FOR MANY YEARS BEFORE I WAS STOLEN.

IT WILL BE *GOOD* TO REST ONCE MORE, AND MY *MOTHER* STILL COMES BY, FROM TIME TO TIME...

JOHANNA?

YES.

WILL YOU SEE MY FATHER *AGAIN*?

I WOULD *HOPE* SO. AFTER ALL, THERE IS STILL THE MATTER OF MY *FEE* TO BE DISCUSSED.

JOHANNA, HE *MUST* CARE FOR ME. DO YOU NOT *THINK* SO? IF MY FATHER DID NOT *CARE* FOR ME, HE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD YOU *RESCUE* ME.

I DO NOT KNOW.

...I TRUST THAT HE WILL REPAY YOU *ADEQUATELY* FOR YOUR TIME AND TROUBLE IN ASSISTING ME.

"WHAT WE OBTAIN TOO CHEAP, WE ESTEEM TOO LIGHTLY," ORPHEUS.

TRUE. BUT WHEN YOU SEE HIM... TELL HIM I *MISS* HIM. I HAVE NOT SEEN HIM FOR *SO* LONG.

NOT EVEN IN YOUR *DREAMS*?

NOT EVEN IN MY DREAMS.

ORPHEUS. I... *TRAVEL* WIDELY. PERHAPS, IN A YEAR OR SO, I COULD *RETURN* TO NAXOS. SEE YOU *AGAIN*. WHAT DO YOU *THINK*?

I DO NOT THINK THAT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA, JOHANNA. GOODBYE.

I never saw him more. But, as the Years have passed, I have, on Occasion, seen *him* in my Dreams. And, from that Time on, the Song of Orpheus has always hovered at the Edge of my Perception; a Melody I can never truly recapture, try howsoever I will.

And do not doubt that there are many in Authority to whom I would sing it, if 'twere within my Power.

NEXT:
AVGVSTVS

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#1 BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

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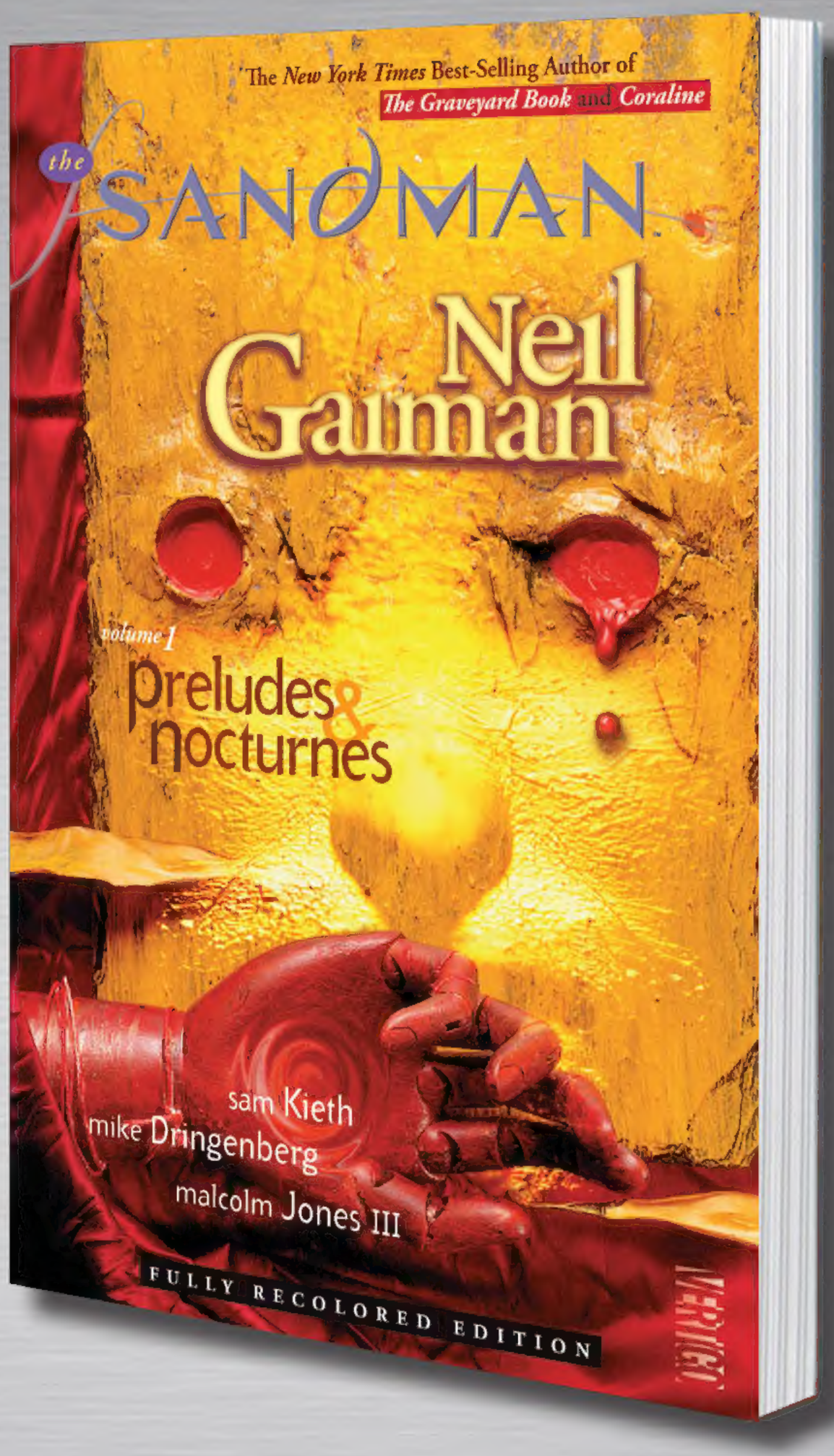
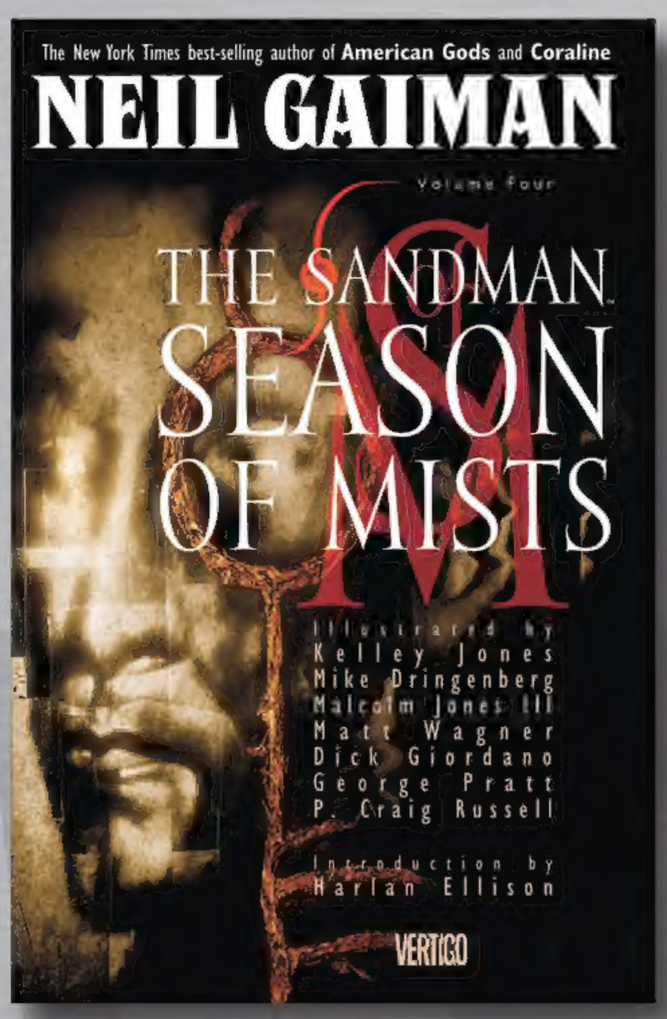
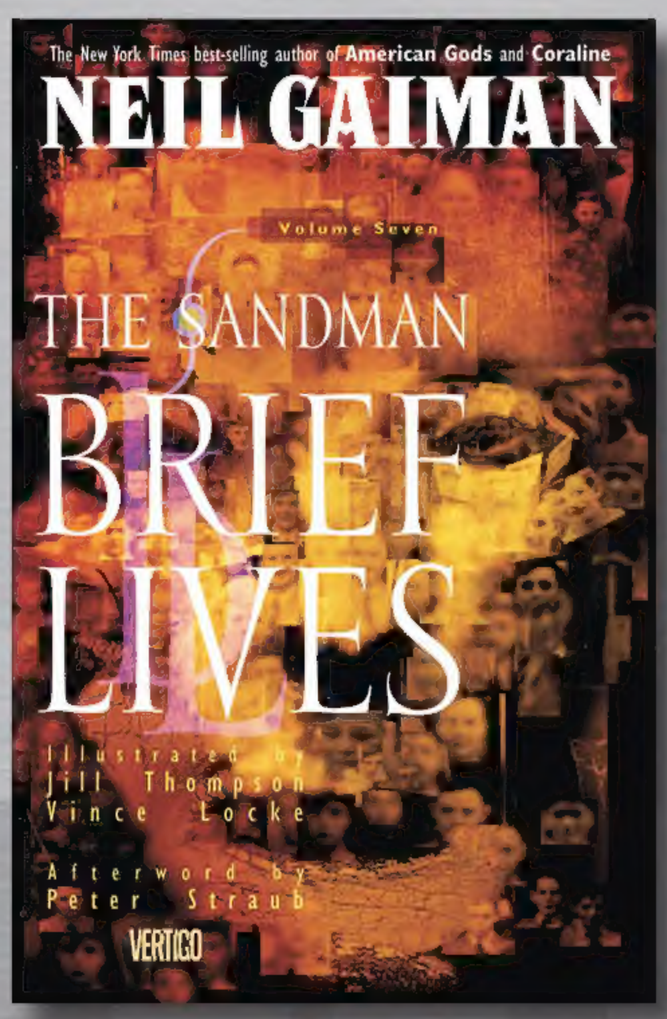


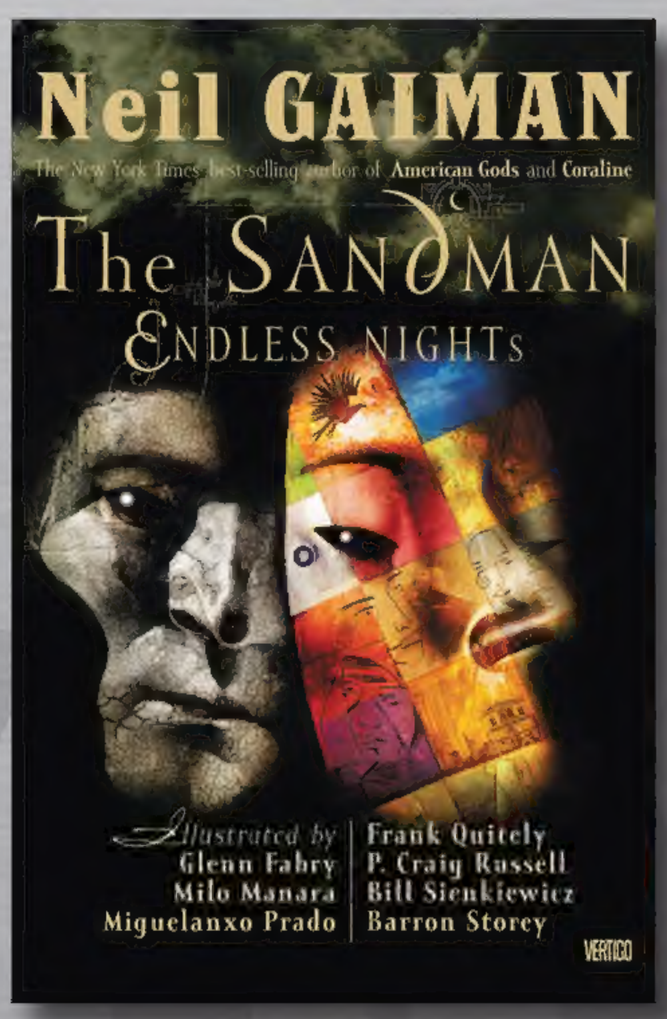
THE SANDMAN VOL. 4:
SEASON OF MISTS



THE SANDMAN VOL. 7:
BRIEF LIVES



THE SANDMAN:
ENDLESS NIGHTS



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